

CRADLE OF U.S. WIRELESS

By W. A. Gregory

LATE in the last year of the last century a distinguished foreigner who dressed in natty tweeds appeared suddenly in the sleepy country village of Babylon, on Long Island just east of New York City. The word soon got around: the stranger was one Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian scientist who sent messages through the air without wires. But what was he doing in Babylon?

Marconi then was fairly well known for his wireless experiments, though he was by no means universally famous, and the townspeople kept an eye on him. They watched as he took the offshore ferry to Fire Island on several occasions, and then one of the Ketchams saw him talking to old Mr. Chew in the field beside his big two-story house.

It wasn't long before everyone in Babylon knew exactly what Signor

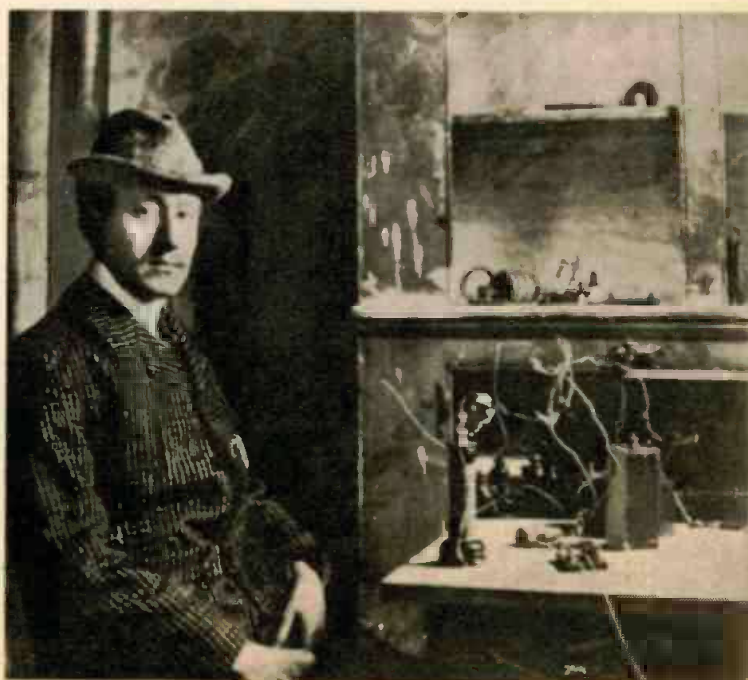
Marconi was up to. He was going to build a wireless station in Mr. Chew's field. Exciting though the news was, few Babylonians could foresee a place in history for their town because of the project. But what the Italian built in Mr. Chew's field was the first commercial wireless station in the United States, and Babylon can rightly claim to be the cradle of the medium in this country.

A tiny frame shed that measured just 12 by 14 feet and looked like a smoke-house soon appeared in the Chew field and beside it was erected a 170-foot wooden mast. Around its base was buried a zinc ring measuring 40 feet in diameter. A wire sloped down from the top of the mast and disappeared inside the building.

Marconi, holder of several wireless
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Revised historical plaque in Babylon, N. Y., now bears Marconi name; people are local historians.

Guglielmo Marconi and some early equipment in his first wireless station in U. S., circa 1901.



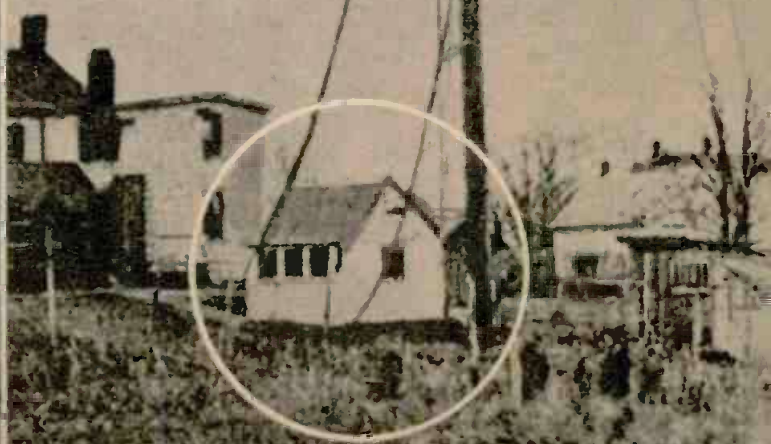
11 Via Condotti Rome.
June 26th 1958.

Dear Mr. Taylor.

Many thanks for the very
interesting photographs taken
of the Marconi building in
Babylon where my husband
made his first work on wireless
for the Marconi Company in
America.

That spot was really the
cradle of the wireless in the
United States of America.

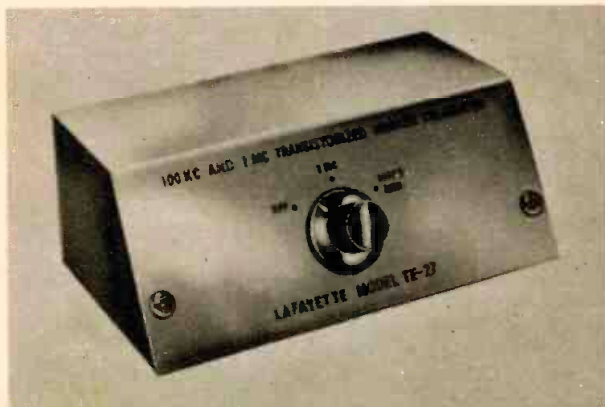
Yours Very Sincerely
Maria Cristina Marconi



Picture post card of 1901 shows tiny shack that
was cradle of U. S. wireless, so identified by
1958 letter above written by widow of Marconi.
Insert photo shows shack being moved about 1930:
beside it are Marconi and David Sarnoff of RCA.

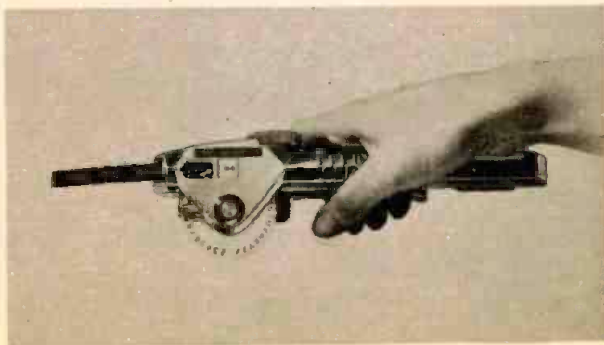
Marketplace

QRG? . . . Tired of asking, "What is my frequency?" You can break the habit with a transistorized crystal calibrator in your ham shack. Two new self-contained Lafayette units that require no warm-up are the easy way of calibrating and aligning receivers and VFO's, and



of marking band edges. Model TE-27 (shown), at \$19, contains 1-mc and 100-kc crystals. The TE-29, \$12, has a 100-kc rock. Both calibrators generate spaced harmonics up to 54 mc. Lafayette Radio, 111 Jericho Tpk., Syosset, N. Y.

Print It! . . . Nowadays the do-it-yourselfer has no trouble finding things to do, and here's another one. He can print his own identification labels for knobs, switches, etc., on electronic equipment which, of course, he has built. The



Dymo Tapewriter is a hand-held tool that works much like a kiddie typewriter. You set a dial to the letter or number desired, take a firm grip and—presto—clear lettering on a colored or black background. Dymo Industries, Inc., Berkeley, Calif.

Cradle of U. S. Wireless

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patents, had established stations along the coast of Britain to communicate with ships as much as 100 miles at sea. But his fame in this country arose mainly from his on-the-scene reports of the America's Cup yacht races which he had done earlier that year (1899) for the New York Herald. These blow-by-blow descriptions of the Columbia's victory over Sir Thomas Lipton's Shamrock, flashed to shore by wireless, became the talk of New York.

Just after the races the Army Signal Corps got hold of Marconi and asked him to establish wireless communications between the Fire Island Lighthouse and the Fire Island Lightship, lying 12 miles offshore. The station in Babylon, on the mainland, came about when Marconi realized that Fire Island itself had no telephone contact with the shore. A station in Mr. Chew's field would link both the lightship and the lighthouse with the mainland.

The station's equipment was modified during its life of some ten years, but the original transmitter and receiver were quite simple. The continuous-wave (CW) transmitter used a ten-inch spark coil Marconi had developed for his first permanent station in Britain. The antenna and ground ring also were the same type used in the English Channel installation. The receiver had an improved and relatively sensitive transformer utilizing the principle of the Faraday induction coil and a redesigned Branly coherer which fed the signal to a telegraph printer.

When Marconi set up his Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company, Ltd., in England in 1898 he was interested only in wireless communications between lightships and lighthouses along the coast. He had no thought of earning money by transmitting commercial messages. It was only after Lord Kelvin insisted on paying commercial telegraph rates for sending a message that Marconi realized the possibilities at hand.

Marconi's reporting of an Irish yacht

race in 1898 attracted the attention of the New York Herald and brought about the inventor's first visit to America in 1899. This in turn, led to his work for the Signal Corps, which then operated our lightships and lighthouses.

The equipment at Babylon was guarded closely and visitors were not permitted. The operator, an Englishman, and his wife and daughter lived in the Chew house and kept an eye on the shack.

During 1900 the station's work was limited to messages for the Signal Corps and experiments. Marconi had gone back to England to work on a rig that was to bring about variable tuning, making it possible to use different wavelengths and giving the inventor a virtual monopoly on tuned wireless in England and America. At this time he also was engaged in setting up a wireless station in Cornwall that was to send the first transatlantic signal to Newfoundland in 1901.

In that year the Babylon station for the first time began communication with ships at sea, the first wireless station in the United States to do so. For this purpose, its location was ideal. Situated to the east of New York and with a direct command of ship lanes approaching the port, it provided the first mainland contact with inbound vessels. A rapid increase in the number of ships with wireless equipment aboard offered an opportunity for ship-to-shore communication that shipping and business interests found valuable and began to use extensively.

When the greater range of newer, more powerful stations led to the abandonment of the Babylon installation, it lay idle and forgotten. The newly organized Radio Corporation of America bought Marconi's American interests shortly after World War I without realizing the existence of the historic shack.

Around 1929 or 1930 Major Edwin Armstrong, inventor of superregenerative, superheterodyne and FM radio, learned by accident of the existence of the building from an early associate of Marconi. Armstrong purchased the shack and presented it to RCA for pres-

ervation as an historic relic. It was transported to the RCA reservation at Rocky Point, Long Island, where it is now kept in a barn to protect it from further deterioration.

In December of 1958 the village of Babylon placed a stone marker at the corner of Fire Island Avenue and Virginia Road to commemorate the historical events that had taken place there. A housing development now covers the Chew property but the old frame house has been moved across the road and is still occupied.

In the files at Rocky Point there is a letter dated June 26, 1958, that in part says: "That spot was really the cradle of . . . wireless in the United States of America." It is signed Maria Cristina Marconi. She was Mrs. Guglielmo Marconi.

Hi-Fi Record Guide

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of instruments and the whole orchestra take turns in swinging on a pendulum from speaker to speaker. The purpose? You've got me, but if you want the effect of being in a rowboat during a storm, here it is.

The Ira Ironstrings Band started as a gag many moons ago, spoofing some of the hallowed conventions of popular music, but in *Ira Ironstrings Destroys the Big Bands*, I sense something new. Sure, the playing is deliberately old-fashioned, with stylistic imitations of name bands, but the music swings. And when you've got that swing, man, you've caught the brass ring.

A lovely girl with a lovely voice sings lovely songs in *Love Makes the World Go Round*. Anna Maria Alberghetti, the winsome star of *Carnival*, does a dozen tuneful standards, including the hit of her own show, appealingly and piquantly, with an assist from orchestra conductor Luther Henderson and some sympathetic recording engineers.

For sheer aural excitement, the sound generated during a performance of Serge Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* is hard to beat. Young Thomas Schippers conducts the New York Philharmonic